

# VetVan

## Veterinary House Calls

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Monday – Friday 7am – 5pm Saturday 8am – 2pm

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## What is the cause?

After informing owners about the nature of their pets' problems I am often asked, what caused the problem. This is not always easy to answer and saying that a virus caused the disease might help sometimes, but often we want to know what lead to the viral infection. The causes of diseases such as arthritis and cancer are harder to explain. I have a special interest in the study of the cause of disease (Epidemiology) and I define 'cause' as any event, problem or condition which increases the risk of disease. Cause can be indirect or direct, necessary, sufficient or contributing.

For example, a toxin might be causing a stomach upset in a pet, with the toxin produced by a fungus only able to grow in a moist environment. In this case the moist environment is considered an indirect cause of disease. The moist environmental conditions are necessary to cause a fungus to grow, which caused the upset stomach, but they are not sufficient to cause illness unless there are other factors involved, such as leaving a bag of food open.

## Vaccine Development

Vaccines are given to provide immunity to susceptible animals from an infectious agent. The development of vaccines is a fascinating subject. Early Asian people (2650 BC) observed that people who had recovered from small pox were immune to further infection, this lead to the practice where susceptible people were rubbed with the scabs of people infected with a mild case of smallpox. This procedure was very crude and did lead to severe disease in some people, however it ultimately proved to be successful with only a 1% mortality rate, while natural infection had a 25% mortality rate.

## Feline Aids Vaccine

A new vaccine has been released onto the market against feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV), the cause of feline aids. Like human aids, feline aids has symptoms relating to poor immune system function such as mouth, throat and lung infections. In contrast to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), FIV is transmitted only via saliva (i.e. fighting, aggression during mating). Consequently, free-roaming male cats are at greatest risk of infection because they fight more and city cats are at higher risk of infection than semi-urban cats because they are more likely to meet an infected cat (due to the higher cat density). If your cat is regularly getting into fights I recommend having them vaccinated. Initially, a blood sample is taken to test for prior exposure and is then followed by 3 vaccines given at 2-4 week intervals, an annual booster is also given. The vaccine is not costly and if you are interested please call me to discuss the matter further.

## What creature is that?

If you found a rat in your house (maybe your cat has just brought you a live present from the garden) could you tell if it was a common ship rat or a native rat-like marsupial such as an Antechinus, Dunnart or Planigale? It is important to recognize the difference so we do not accidentally trap or poison our native inhabitants. The most common introduced rat (ship rat) has a tail that is longer than their body, while native species have a tail that is shorter than their body. Native species are also generally half the size of a ship rat. So next time you get close to a rodent – have a closer look.

## Management of Arthritis

Arthritis is a common problem of dogs (cats less so). Sometimes it is so severe, painful and debilitating that it is necessary to euthanase a pet. Arthritis is caused by a combination of animal factors (e.g. hip dysplasia, body weight) and environmental factors (e.g. falls, hit by car, exercise injuries). Treatment involves courses of anti-inflammatories with doses and treatment times customised for each patient. Additional long term management includes dietary supplements, cartilage stimulating injections, massage and short walks on a lead.

One thing I have learnt from my years of practice is that the sooner an owner becomes committed to managing arthritis the better the long term outcome.